

# Robert D. Ballard

1942–



**HOW HE AFFECTED THE WORLD** In addition to discovering deep-sea creatures, undersea volcanoes, and famous lost ships, Robert Ballard has helped thousands of students become interested in science.



*As you read the biography below, think about personal qualities such as perseverance that a successful explorer needs.*

Oceans cover more than seventy percent of the Earth. As an explorer, naval officer, scientist, author, and educator, Robert Ballard has spent his life uncovering secrets that lie deep beneath the surface.

Ballard was born in Wichita, Kansas, but his family soon moved to San Diego, California. There he spent much of his time playing on the beach and exploring **tidal pools**. “The ocean was my friend—my best friend,” Ballard remembers. He also remembers being fascinated by Jules Verne’s science-fiction tale *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. He dreamed of sailing with the book’s hero, Captain Nemo, in his fantastic submarine.

Ballard studied marine geology and **geophysics** in college. In 1967 he joined the U.S. Navy and helped make maps of the ocean floor. He also made his first dive in a submarine. Later he explored undersea mountains in a **submersible**. In 1977 Ballard used a submersible to explore an area near the Galápagos Islands. There he discovered giant worms and other creatures that live in places much deeper than people had thought possible. He later discovered underwater volcanoes off the coast of Baja California in Mexico.



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## VOCABULARY

**tidal pools** low, rocky areas that remain full of water at low tide

**geophysics** the study of the effects that physical forces (wind, earthquakes, tides, etc.) have on the earth

**submersible** an underwater vehicle that can travel deeper than a submarine

**archaeology** the study of life in past cultures and civilizations

Ballard worked to develop robotic vehicles that used cameras to explore deep beneath the sea. In 1985 one of these vehicles helped him make his most famous discovery—the wreck of the *R.M.S. Titanic*, which sank in 1912. Since then, Ballard has found other famous lost ships.

In 1989 Ballard established the JASON project—named after the Greek mythical hero Jason—to let students participate in underwater explorations. A robotic vehicle sends signals by two-way satellite to schools all over the world. Students can see underwater images, talk to scientists, and even take the controls.

Today Ballard specializes in underwater **archaeology**. He looks forward to “a great period of exploration in the next few decades as we find missing chapters of human history and rewrite the history books.”

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**1. Recall** How did Robert Ballard make his childhood dream come true?

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**2. Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** What do you think was Ballard’s greatest accomplishment? Provide reasons that support your opinion.

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### ACTIVITY

Use your library or online sources to research one of Robert Ballard’s expeditions to a sunken ship. Make a poster that contains details about the ship and about its discovery.